The Sociocultural Factors Influencing Chilean EFL Teachers to Sit for Language Proficiency Examinations

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand some of the relevant sociocultural factors influencing five Chilean teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to sit for an international language proficiency examination in 2019. Some major findings involved the perception of language proficiency certifications as an external imposition that affected teachers' working stability, career prospects, and income. The participants also proposed a potential link between language proficiency levels and the pedagogical activities teachers could do in the classroom. However, there was a tendency towards perceiving other factors (i.e., interpersonal factors) as more significant constituents of their roles and identities as EFL teachers in Chile, which is somehow in agreement with what was proposed by other authors in the field. The conclusions of this study support previous investigations questioning the relevance given to language proficiency examinations in EFL contexts, and how such relevance can have an impact on teachers' professional lives.

INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency has historically been regarded as the most relevant aspect of the subject knowledge of an EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher in different parts of the globe (Chacón, 2005; Richards, Conway, Roksvist, and Harvey, 2013; Nel & Müller, 2010). In the Chilean context, we have also been affected by this trend. As expressed in the Framework for Good Teaching from the Chilean Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), subject knowledge is established as its very first domain, confirming such relevance (CPEIP, 2008). The importance given to language proficiency in our local context has been further emphasized by the recent professional development program "English in English", created by MINEDUC and aimed to in-service EFL teachers currently working in public schools (Chilean Ministry of Education, 2019). Even though the program focused on several other domains of the profession, such as curriculum design and language teaching methodology, it also had the intention of promoting a language proficiency enhancement on its participants, which would involve an international language proficiency certification process.

The opinions on this issue seem to be rather divided. On the one hand, some authors believe that teachers actually require a certain level of language proficiency to be able to provide their students with some meaningful and comprehensible input, considering that they might be their main source of it in the classroom (Nel & Müller, 2010), and that being aware of their English level could have an impact on the methodologies and activities used by them in the classroom – or at least on how teachers perceive them— (Chacon, 2005). On the other hand, some authors have decided to stand against the imposed demands for a specific language proficiency level as some sort of unmistakable proof that an EFL teacher is a competent professional (Barahona, 2018). In general terms, the possible relationship among these variables –EFL teaching methodology and language proficiency—remains relatively unclear, bringing to light the

question of why EFL teachers, national policy makers, and educational stakeholders should be overly concerned about their language proficiency levels.

As a plausible perspective to help us understand the reasons why teachers seek language proficiency certifications, Norton (2016) presents us with the concept of identity in relation to power struggles and voices that need to be heard, which could be related to the imposed and resisted identities in Chilean EFL teachers, who are demanded to prove their own language proficiency levels by external stakeholders (e.g., public and private school owners and managers). Salinas (2017) supports this idea through what she refers to as macro contextual factors that influence EFL teacher professional identity formation, particularly referring to the demands from the current educational policies regarding the language proficiency levels for pre-service and in-service teachers in Chile, and the impact they could have on the levels of self-confidence and working conditions of our EFL professionals.

In order to understand the sociocultural factors that influence Chilean EFL teachers to sit for language proficiency certifications, a group of five education professionals who were interested in taking part in a training course for either the exam C1 Advanced or B2 First from Cambridge were selected as the participants of this study. The general information of the participants can be summarized on the following table:

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Working Environment

1	Luigi	Male	Private Tutor (freelance)/Navy officer(fulltime)
2	Ali	Female	British Bilingual School (Pre-school teacher)
3	Flora	Female	British Bilingual School (Pre-school teacher)
4	Gabe	Male	Language Institute (freelance)
5	Paul	Male	Language Institute (freelance)

Table 1: Summary of the basic demographic information of the participants of this study.

In general terms, this study aims to understand the motivations of the participants to sit for this type of test, how they perceive themselves as language users, and how they imagine that passing –or failing—this type of examination could affect them.

Research objectives

The research question that will be guiding this project is the following: What are some of the factors that make language proficiency examinations be perceived as relevant by Chilean EFL teachers? In order to answer this question, two objectives have been proposed:

- To understand the sociocultural factors influencing a group of Chilean EFL teachers to sit for an international examination.
- To explore the relevance of language proficiency certifications in a group of Chilean EFL teachers' professional identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociocultural theory (SCT), a psychosocial perspective originally proposed by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, encompasses a view of mental development as an ongoing mediated process that is always situated in a context (Lantolf, 2000). Unlike most cognitive approaches in psychology at the time, SCT is unpreceded in considering the social contexts where learning and interaction take place. Esmonde and Booker (2016) also support this idea by positing that learning does not occur in isolation, and that higher order thinking processes need social interaction to have an environment where they can be manifested.

Within SCT, the concept of mediation takes some considerable relevance since it acts as the necessary link between individual cognitive process and the social and academic environments where they take place (Esmonde and Booker, 2016). The mediator, which can be either another person, a physical object, or a symbol, is a necessary requirement for an individual to be able to monitor –or mediate—their own cognitive processes (Lantolf, 2000). As a construct, it should be noted that mediation rarely is presented as ideologically neutral, since, on its very essence, it involves an asymmetrical relation of power between two entities on different levels of hierarchy (Esmonde and Booker, 2016).

Self

According to Harre (1987) in Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), the notion of self could be understood only by contrasting it with the concept of person. The later corresponds to the public image or perception given by others through social interaction and the former can be defined as "the still center of experience" that an individual could have on their own contexts in terms of time, place, levels of responsibility, and social standing. It is also stated by Harre and Gillet

(1994) (as in Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000) that the concept of self is dynamic and it is in continuous development through social practice.

Identity

Supporting the previous idea, Norton (1997) defines the concept of identity as the manner individuals understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is co-constructed across time and space, and the potentialities for the future they may have. This perspective could also be related to the previously aforementioned concepts of self and person (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000) since Norton (1997) also relates her conception of identity to a need for recognition and power, even making reference to language proficiency levels as one of the instances where these desirable features could –or could not—be attainable by non-native speakers and teachers, thus leading to forging, developing, imaging, or resisting new potential identities (Norton, 2017).

Following the same argument, Norton and Toohey (2011) refers to the perception of some specific identities as more appropriate than others at certain target language communities, thus reinforcing the notion that some identities may be imposed or resisted in certain contexts, which could be the case of Chilean teachers when they feel imposition of certifying their English language proficiency in order to validate one key aspect of their profession.

Teacher identity

Morgan (2004) points out that the professional and personal identities of a teacher continuously develop in parallel as two relatively simultaneous processes that result from struggles of power and knowledge that naturally take place in discursive instances within social interactions. Supporting this point, Noonan (2018) conceptualizes teacher professional identity considering three different domains: personal experience (i.e., related to aspects that are framed outside a traditional classroom view, such a race, gender, and sexual orientation), professional context (i.e., specific needs for professional development and constrains derived from institutional settings), and political domain (i.e., national and international regulations and educational policies). All these previously mentioned points are somehow addressed by Coldron and Smith (1999), who claim that a teacher professional identity can be understood as the way is teacher is seen by their own selves and others, while also being socially legitimated.

Language proficiency

The language proficiency level of EFL teachers has had different conceptions along history. According to Chacon (2005), language proficiency is considered the most important area of content knowledge for a foreign language educator. This statement is partially supported thanks to the strong influence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the current teaching methodology trends, heavily relying on the teacher's proficiency level in the target language in order to communicative effectively with their students (Richards et al., 2012). This idea seems to be somehow taken even further by Nel and Müller (2010), who refer to Krashen's Input Hypothesis by raising awareness of the impact that the language proficiency levels of teachers

could have on the quality of the input that their learners receive, provided that they could be their most frequent and largest source of input in the target language.

Taking an opposite point of view, Barahona (2018) questions the relevance given by teacher training programs –and professional development programs—to language proficiency enhancement while somehow neglecting the development of pedagogical skills. Nonetheless, Richards et al. (2012) describe a possible correlation between language proficiency and classroom practices by foreign language educators, thus proposing a potential plausible link between the two types of knowledge.

Chilean EFL teacher identity

 Chilean EFL teachers are–in their vast majority— NNESTs (Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers) currently teaching English at any level of the Chilean educational system. For this reason, some problems that tend to affect NNESTs, such as the impostor syndrome mentioned by Bernat (2008) or the role of the teacher as a source of input mentioned by Nel and Müller (2010) could be expected to occur in the linguistic context of the country as well. Additionally, Salinas (2017) makes reference to a current specific constraint, caused by the national educational policy aiming to align the EFL teaching methodologies in the country to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standards, thus promoting a change towards a more communicative approach to teaching the foreign language. Along the same lines with Barahona's (2018) view on teacher education programs in the country, Abrahams and Farias (2010) also express some concern regarding what they called the "divorce" between pedagogical skills and linguistic knowledge development. Moreover, the same authors also comment on the lack of flexibility in the standard national curriculum and the lack of resources and opportunities

for innovation in some educational settings in the country, somehow confirming a lack of agency for teachers in such aspects.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed following a qualitative research epistemology, which is characterized by a world view where reality is not conceived as a single and objective truth, but as an array of equally valid several different multiple realities (McKay, 2006). Due to the specific nature of this study, it resulted considerably relevant to explore the individual differences related to the different sociocultural factors that influenced each of these teachers to sit for their language proficiency examination. The need to understand these diverging experiences from each of the participants of this study was what motivated the decision to base this project on a qualitative epistemology (James, 2008).

Along the same lines, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was a viable alternative that could lead to a deeper understanding of the reasons and motivations behind the participants' decision to sit for these examinations in relation to the national and institutional contexts on the participants.

The conception of self, presented in CHAT (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004), provides us with a richer insight on the link between personal and contextual factors by understanding the self as a personal or psychological construct that is constantly influenced by social or contextual forces throughout an individual's history. Furthermore, it should also bring the possibility of observing the interaction between the external demands for teachers to obtain a certification of their

English language proficiency level and the imposed identities that such demands might promote on the group of teachers participating on this study (Norton, 2017).

Context

Cambridge Examinations and the Common European Framework of Reference.

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) was developed between 1993 and 1996 to provide a viable alternative to measure the language proficiency levels of different users through descriptive schemes, which would be later realized into communicative actions by the Can-Do Statements (North, 2007). The framework is divided into different levels ranging from A1 (basic user) to C2 (proficient user).

The CEFR and the Chilean Context

The current demands from the Chilean Ministry of Education require in-service EFL teachers working in the public system to certify their English language proficiency levels at B2 level of the CEFR, whereas pre-service teachers are expected to finish their undergraduate programs holding a C1 certification of their English language proficiency. Nonetheless, Rojas (2013) points out that 94% of the teachers that took part in the previous national teacher evaluation (after analyzing video-recorded lessons) were not considered to have achieved a B2 level of the language. The arguments provided were based on the teachers' delivery of their recorded lesson, and were based on a weak command of the language given by the misuse of certain grammatical forms, inaccurate pronunciation, and a lack of the oral fluency expected at the level.

Conversely, within the national context, it results common for private schools, universities, and language institutes to request a language proficiency certification at a specific level to their new prospective teachers during selection processes. In some particular contexts (e.g., bilingual

schools) this may not only apply to EFL teachers, but also to other professionals such as elementary and nursery school teachers. In some cases, institutions even consider such certifications as an important factor within their selection criteria to hire new teachers, or even determine their wages and salaries.

The participants

This study involved five participants who were preparing to sit for the examinations C1: Advanced and B2: First from Cambridge. The present section aims to provide an in-depth characterization of each of the teachers who took part in this research. At this point, it results necessary to state that all the information presented in this section has been authorized to be shared as part of this research, and that the participants' anonymity will be respected by representing them by a pseudonym, which will be used to identify them throughout the rest of this study.

The group was composed by two female and three male educators who worked in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching at different levels and educational settings in Chile. All of them are Chilean citizens living in the V region, and their ages ranged from 26 to 36 years old. Three of the participants were licensed EFL teachers whereas the two others were nursery school teachers working in bilingual schools who needed to certify their language proficiency levels and had postgraduate level studies related to EFL teaching.

Luigi (Age: 31) was a teacher of English as a foreign language with a master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and three years of experience doing private lessons as an additional source of income. His main job was as a navy officer and a rescue swimmer in the Chilean army. Based on his responses from the demographic questionnaire that

was administered at the beginning of the study, he declared that he is interested in sitting for the exam aiming to further his professional development and out of a personal interest in the discipline.

Ali (Age: 36) was a nursery teacher with a diploma in Teaching English to YLEs (Young Learners of English) and had eleven years of teaching experience. She was working in a British bilingual school and was required by her institution to certify her English language proficiency level to a B2 of the CEFR in order to ensure her continuity for the following year.

Flora (Age: 26) was also a nursery teacher working in a different British bilingual school. She had four years of experience and is currently a candidate for a master's in TESOL. Her English level was already certified at B2 level of the CEFR, and she was aiming to obtain a C1 certification as a further step in her professional development as a personal decision.

Gabe (Age: 33) was an EFL teacher working freelance in a local language institute as his main source of income. His institution determines the hourly rates for the monthly wages of their teachers based solely on the level of their most recent certification. He was aiming to obtain a C1 level to improve his standing at the institute and to apply for better job opportunities

Paul (Age: 27) was a teacher of English working freelance in the same language institute as Gabe. On his particular case, he was also a teacher of Portuguese and worked most of his weekly hours either as a private tutor or for other institutions. Unlike Gabe, the language institute was not his main source of income.

The data collection strategy

According to the types of research described by Van Lier (1988), in McKay (2006), this paper corresponds to the "watching" category, since the variables are less controlled and structured and the objective of this research was to understand the sociocultural factors influencing the participants to sit for an English language proficiency examination, without intervening in such factors. It is for this reason that this project included a demographic questionnaire, two semi-structured interviews, and an autobiographical narrative as its sources for data collection.

Demographic questionnaire.

A demographic questionnaire (DQ) was administered during the first session of the course in which this particular study took place in order to understand some relevant aspects of the participants' professional and personal selves, their academic background, and current working environment. The DQ provided some general information of the participants, including: their personal background (e.g., age, city of origin, and city of residence), professional history (e.g., the university and program where they studied, postgraduate courses, years of working experience, and their current working environment), as well as some information related to language proficiency (e.g., English examinations they had taken up to that point).

The last section of the demographic questionnaire consisted on the question "Why do you want to prepare for this exam?", intended to provide some general insight on the participants' motivations. According to Stetsenko & Arievitch (2004), doing this could lead to some preliminary understanding of the participants' conception of self in Cultural Historical Activity Theory by retrieving some significant insights from their own personal histories in relation to language proficiency certifications.

Semi-structured interviews.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted following a qualitative paradigm. Additionally, a third interview was originally expected to be included, but it was not possible to carry it out due to the national contingency during the last quarter of 2019. Considering that the participants actually were students preparing for an international examination in a paid course, Interview 1 (I-1) was administered through WhatsApp audios outside of class time with the intention of fully respecting their time as students in the institute offering the training course.   Nonetheless, and under their own preference, interview 2 (I-2) was administered during class time.

Auto-biographical narratives.

First person narratives have been historically marginalized as a valid source of research data. Nonetheless, in the later years, they have been acknowledged as valuable, particularly under the sociocultural perspective (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). For this study, the participants were asked to write an autobiographical narrative while answering the following set of questions to guide their writing process: 1) Why did you become a teacher? 2) What makes a good teacher? 3) What do you need to improve as a teacher? 4) How important is English proficiency for you as a teacher? 5) How important should language proficiency be for teachers in general? This data collection instrument was presented to the participants as a preliminary writing assignment during the first sessions of their courses.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used data analysis method in social sciences, resulting particularly useful for this investigation due to its flexibility in allowing categories to be raised inductively in response to the common patterns found in the different sources of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In general terms, this would imply identifying commonalities in the discourse of the participants among the different sources of data before raising categories that could represent the gist of what was expressed among different extracts.

Conversely, CHAT enriches this study by providing a view of activity that goes beyond the actions of an individual, but that also considers the role of a community and the rules or demands this subject receives from that community (Foot, 2014). Moreover, CHAT also considers the role of agency both at a subjective and inter-subjective level, which can be reflected on the possible reasons provided by the participants of this study to sit for an English language proficiency certification and its potential consequent effect on their professional identities (Oswald & Perold, 2015).

The coding system.

To provide a clear organization and structure, the participants will keep the same code from previous sections (i.e., Luigi - Paul) and the data collection instruments will be represented as follows:

Instrument	Code
Demographic Questionnaire	DQ
Auto-Biography	AB
Interview 1	I1
Interview 2	I2

Table 2: Representation of the coding system for this study.

As a further example, a quote using this system would be presented in the following manner:

Coding	Quote
Paul AB	Each teacher has their own essence, so I think it is not easy to say what makes a good teacher since teachers can find their own ways to be excellent professionals.

Table 3: One of Paul's comments on the narrative autobiographical instrument administered as part of the data collection strategy of this study.

In the case of interviews, the number of the question would also be included as part of the code, as exemplified on the following table:

Coding	Quote
Luigi I1Q2	I want to be certified because it will contribute to my skills as an English teacher.

Table 4: Example of the coding system for individual questions in the interviews.

FINDINGS

This section will present some relevant findings from the data analysis procedures that could lead to meaningful insights to understand some of the sociocultural factors influencing teachers to sit for language proficiency examinations.

Language proficiency is related to improved pedagogical practices

Some participants seemed to perceive a link between their language proficiency level and the activities they could carry out in the classroom as teachers, this was exemplified by Luigi in extracts such as:

> "If teachers have more language competence, there will be a wider range of activities which could be done in the classroom. For example, with a larger and better quality of language teacher skills, innovative activities could be done. In fact, improvisation will be more meaningful as it consequently will contribute in students' learning" (Luigi I2Q2).

From an arguably similar point of view, albeit maybe not as explicitly, Gabe also made some reference to a possible link between the language proficiency level of a teacher and the activities –or actions—that they may perform in a classroom, observed in the following extract:

> "Right. I have wondered the same, but to be honest I would say that is quite crucial nowadays because if you're teaching, eh, English, right? Could be as a foreign language or as a second language is, huh, essential that you master or that you handle what you teach, right? Imagine that, for example, you are preparing some students, for example, to certify their level of English, but you don't actually handle the level, huh, is not consistent, right? So, I would say

that that's the reason we should have our, eh, English certified by a back-up. Right? Yes."

(Gabe 1Q2)

Language proficiency is not determinant for an EFL teacher

Participants also mentioned some different aspects –rather than language proficiency—as more determinant factors for an EFL teacher, as can be seen in the following extract:

"In terms of being able to transmit a message, or being able to convey ideas, I do not think that a high level of proficiency is necessary. Being highly proficient in a language is not necessary in order to communicate. On the other hand, for me, as a teacher of English and Portuguese, it is important to help my students to speak and write the language they are learning the best they can" (Paul AB)

Showing some agreement with Paul, Ali also commented on the value of other features, such as interpersonal skills, that could have a more significant impact on an EFL teacher identity and practice:

"I think, hmm, is, huh, a good teacher or an excellent teacher is not always, eh, that one speaks perfect English. I think you are not only a person who can speak another language. A teacher has to be a lot of, skills and abilities, social abilities with the students have to be empathy, have to listening at the students and try to identify, eh, what activities or what strategies has to use with each student." (Ali I2Q3)

Teachers sit for these exams because of the consequences they may imply

The participants expressed diverging concerns regarding how passing or failing their language proficiency certification could affect them, referring to their own self-perceptions as professionals and the social impact it could represent in their current and prospective working environments.

Regarding the consequences or failing the exam, the responses showed some variety:

"What could be the consequence, the consequences of passing or failing this exam? I think that the consequences, um, by passing it's, um, great because I will feel more confident as an-as an-as an English language teacher. Um, I will have more tools to share with my students, and I think that all positive things if I take this. On the contrary, if I fail this exam, I think I will feel a little bad, uh, um, at the beginning, but also that I have to work, to work…keep working in order to take this, this level, C1 at least, but I'm not thinking negatively. I think that I most likely will pass this by working hard and in the pace that is required by my, my	"And then I had to study and concentrate a bit. Then, I had to, I, eh, I take the first time, eh, FCE I didn't pass, so I had to prepare and take it again; and, then, I passed it. And then immediately because I was like pressured, I would say by my, my boss I had to take the, the CAE, the C1; and then, I realized that I wasn't really, eh, prepared for that. So, I took it and I was about to pass it and this would be, eh, the fourth, eh, the fourth time that I will take the exam. I'm not really proud to be honest, but it's something that I have, I will conquer it [laughs]. Yeah, I [inaudible] that I have to do it and, eh, I'll do my best." (Gabe I1Q3)

teacher advisor of this exam. So, I'm really confident to pass this in December" (Luigi I1Q5)	

Table 7. The participants' expectations about the exams.

In relation to some of the possible reasons behind the relative difference in confidence between Luigi and Gabe regarding the examinations, it should be pertinent to remember their contextual differences. Luigi is not currently required to hold a language proficiency certification and he is not formally working as a teacher, whereas Gabe is highly dependent on his test results to increase his income or ensure his working stability. On his case, the only viable alternative to increase his income in his current working environment is by effectively passing C1: Advanced.

Teachers are aware of the role of language proficiency certifications in their working environment

The participants repeatedly commented about their insights in relation to the consequences having –or not having—a certain level certification could have on their professional lives, particularly from their current or prospective employers as EFL teachers in Chile.

I personally think that the main motivations for a teacher to reach a certain level of English competence is due to internal obligations. An illustration of this is the motivation to teach at university. Some English teacher needs certain level of English and certifications to improve their curriculum, and then, they have more possibilities to teach in that level. (Luigi I2Q4)
I think there are not consequences of passing or failing the exam. Maybe passing [stutters] I will have an extra, um, money here at school, and failing, well, I will have to

prepare it more to pass it, eh, the second time with a, a good level, but nothing happens. (Flora I1Q5)
And then immediately because I was like pressured, I would say by my, my boss I had to take the, the CAE, the C1; and then, I realized that I wasn't really, eh, prepared for that. (Gabe I1Q4)
First one, eh, is when you have, you are, eh, an external obligation. For, for example, from your boss or for the school where you work. Eh, I think, eh, that is, that is a one motivation. (Ali I2Q4)

Similarly, on several occasions, the participants expressed some concerns or knowledge regarding the relevance of language proficiency levels for EFL teachers in Chile, of which some examples can be found on the next table:

"When it comes to language proficiency, I would say is an issue for many colleagues because they may feel threatened to sit for an international examination to measure their level of English because some of them teach L2 in a vulnerable context. Currently the Ministry of Education is asking the teacher to certify their language proficiency with a C1 level. Nevertheless, they are supported by a course or guidance to learn some techniques to sit the exam as well as receive feedback in their performance." (Gabe AB)
"However, it seems that external obligations will appear because of the government is requiring to teachers to be certified in one of the top English levels." (Luigi I2Q4)

Table 8. Knowledge of the participants about the national standards.

Hereby, some participants showed a degree of awareness regarding the ministerial requirements for EFL teachers in relation to the national demands and whole expressing how they relate to

them. Conversely, Ali and Flora puts forward a relevant consideration regarding the need for a specific language proficiency level for certain specific working environments:

"English proficiency in my school is very important because we are in an immersion program were teachers need to speak in English all the time and teach the different assignments in English too, so it's highly important the proficiency you have in the language so that you can teach as its expected. And I think that in general, the language proficiency has a strong relation to the context where you teach because in some schools maybe it's not so important to be the best English teacher and to have a determinate level of English." (Flora AB)
"I think it depends of the, eh, in which level that English teacher is working because if you are working in a pre-school level, of course, doesn't matter if you teach-if your English is very, eh, eh, is very perfect, it doesn't matter because you, you have to speak, eh, but *basical* and, and the activities in the classroom are very, eh, basic for the boys and girls." (Ali I2Q2).

Table 9. Context awareness regarding language proficiency from the participants working at bilingual schools.

DISCUSSION

The notion of English language proficiency as an important aspect to an EFL teacher's actions in the classroom has not been strange to literature (Chacon, 2005). Nonetheless, such situation may seem to be more closely related to what Barahona (2018) and Salinas (2017) refer to as a "historical demand" for language proficiency without it being necessarily related to any current theoretical underpinnings. Even though the participants showed to be potentially aware of their likely role as input providers (Nel & Müller, 2010), particularly the nursery school teachers Ali and Flora, it was not possible during this study to gather more significant data on how they

explicitly related those notions. Furthermore, the belief of the two of them –Ali and Flora— about "needing" to prove a high level of English language proficiency may be possibly related to a sociocultural imposition from their teaching context rather than a research-based decision that effectively takes into consideration the current knowledge about the priorities for an effective EFL teacher (Barahona and Ibaceta-Quijanes, 2019).

It is also plausible to reflect on the presence of what Bernat (2008) referred to as "impostor syndrome" on some of the Chilean teachers who took part on this study due to their non-native status and, in cases like Gabe's, their lack of the required qualifications for his current working environment. Nevertheless, it could not be fully asserted whether his self-efficacy as an EFL teacher may be actually related to his current language proficiency level (Chacon, 2005), or to other factors that somehow go beyond the scope of this study as could be the case of test anxiety –regarding his repeated attempts to pass C1: Advanced—or the demands from his work environment and the consequential validity issues that may arise on the potential increase on his income in case of passing the exam or the possibility of his working stability being negatively affected in case of failure. Even though Norton (1997) proposes identity in connection to the expectations an individual may have in relation to their future, the limitations of this study somehow hazarded the opportunity to explore further if this was the case for the participants, especially Gabe.

Notwithstanding the previous arguments, it could still be possible to propose that the participants of this study also shared an influence on their teacher professional identities related to what Salinas (2017) considered micro and macro contextual factors (i.e., their own engagement and the influence of external demands from the state as well as their current, former, and prospective employers).

All things considered, the presence of some internal and external factors that influence the participants' teacher identities before, during and after a language proficiency enhancement course could be proposed, at least within the scope of this study.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was carried out with the intention of shedding some light on different sociocultural factors that may influence Chilean EFL teachers to sit for a language proficiency examination. In general terms, the findings may seem to show a series of factors, with the most relevant of them being: 1. A belief that language proficiency has an influence on pedagogical practices, 2. Without disregards to the first point, that language proficiency is not the most important aspect of a Chilean EFL teacher identity and practice, and 3. That the need for a language proficiency certification is generally mediated –or even imposed—by relevant stakeholders such as school principals or even the Chilean Ministry of Education.

Implications

The present study could be considered for reference to in-service EFL teachers needing to approach a language proficiency certification, language teaching education programs, and relevant stakeholders who may benefit from considering teachers' perspectives when deciding to implement language proficiency standards as a relevant element to assess teaching quality. Furthermore, this research may be useful to raise some important questions regarding the impositions placed on teachers in English as a foreign language context on this topic, and how their professional identities and working conditions might be affected by them.

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